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# PUBLIC OPINION AND DEFENSE

BY MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM HARDING CARTER, U. S. A.

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THE activities of societies for the prevention of international disputes and the practical fact of ever increasing armament afford indisputable evidence that upon no other subject are men further from agreement than that of the necessity for war. If there be a middle ground between the extremes of opinion in this matter, it will constitute a genuine claim to the world's gratitude if America shall mark the course and lead the way.

In the present state of the public mind, arising from a knowledge of the horrors of modern war, as depicted in current illustrations and news from the far-flung battle lines in Europe, there is danger of drawing general conclusions from isolated examples and of attempting to apply them to our country. There is no occasion for hysteria, inasmuch as our military problems have long been known and discussed with frankness and persistency. We have been slowly approaching a crisis which it was perfectly apparent would arrive whenever we attempted to detach from the mobile army garrisons and the coast fortifications within the United States the troops agreed upon as necessary for the defense of the Panama Canal, Hawaii, the Philippines and Alaska. Since the war with Spain we have simply drifted from one obligation to another endeavoring to solve each problem at the suggestion of expediency rather than the dictation of policy.

An educated public opinion is the best guarantee of wise, continuing and certain action, but it requires much study and reflection to arrive at a comprehensive knowledge of any policy of national dimensions.

It is now forty years since Congress undertook to formulate a military policy by means of a long series of hearings of distinguished officers of the Civil War. The result of an immense labor was the simple announcement that: "Our

army is viewed as a nucleus wherein is to be acquired and preserved military knowledge and from which should radiate the elements of instruction and discipline, thus to form in time of war a competent force endowed with talent to direct it as a whole, and provided with agencies capable of grasping the responsibility, organization and distribution of numerous supplies necessary to the conduct of successful military operations."

With such a limitation the regular army fulfills its mission perfectly, but during the period which has elapsed since Congress accepted this elementary policy the world has undergone many political and territorial readjustments. Within our own territory during the same period we have experienced an industrial and agricultural development at such high pressure that an empire of mountain and prairie has been changed from hunting grounds of wild Indians to prosperous States. The war with Spain came and left in its wake new and untried problems, involving military occupation of the distant Philippine Islands. Hawaii, in its relation to world strategy, has increased enormously in importance since the completion of the Panama Canal. Alaska, too, takes on new value when strategical questions involving the Pacific are under consideration. With the completion of the Panama Canal the integrity of the Monroe Doctrine has become even more essential to our national self-interests, and the nation stands squarely for its maintenance by force of arms if need be.

All these things relate to military policy, but must be normally solved as subordinate questions of civil policy. This nation is not prepared now, and, under our form of government, never can be prepared, to announce beforehand what its action will be upon all world questions. We have given abundant evidence of our desire to avoid entanglements in the affairs of other nations and to arbitrate as far as may be possible all questions which do not compromise the nation's honor. It is morally certain that not only our altruistic ideas of fair play but the actual delimitations of our existing treaties of arbitration will prevent all preparations for war during the period provided for preliminary consideration of matters in dispute. Nations, signatories to such treaties with us, whose armies and reserves are always organized, have, therefore, a manifest advantage in case of the failure of diplomatic adjustment of questions at issue.

A well-balanced distribution of the influence of nations, in the future as in the past, depends upon the ability of each to guard its own interests. A nation blessed with boundless resources and with the energy necessary to develop them has all the crude elements of military strength. Given unlimited time without interference, the multiplication of battleships and the creation of armies may follow along normal lines.

Such a business-like proceeding, however, is not apt to obtain with a virile and energetic opponent to dispute its progress. Modern wars do not allow much time for preparation before the first blow is struck, and it is the first battle which counts most when the appeal to arms has been made. The prestige of a proud nation may be sadly lowered by lack of foresight and preparedness, and patriotism and material interest alike suggest the propriety of giving the highest moral support to those who undertake to fit the nation in time of peace for the shocking realities of war.

It is clearly a national duty to provide for the contingencies of war before the occasion for the use of armies shall arise; but Congress should not lightly be charged with neglect nor held up to scorn for failure to adopt every suggestion as to military and naval preparedness, for experienced legislators well know that policies change with chameleon-like rapidity, and that continuing and large appropriations must be explained and defended by practical facts and not with flights of oratory.

There is a fellowship and a freemasonry in politics difficult for the layman to understand, but directly traceable to pressure of constituents in behalf of local interests. Many worthy causes are sacrificed as hostages to political expediency even when great principles are at stake.

Under the pressure of grave emergencies, no other nation has been more prodigal than America in giving of its wealth for military and naval purposes. In normal times, however, there is no more thankless task than that of endeavoring to prove to one's fellow citizens that we should not only preserve the excellent features of past military systems, but also bend our efforts to avoid the repetition of past humiliating experiences.

It is a wise business safeguard to take account of stock occasionally, and examine into current methods to determine if an establishment is on a proper basis as compared

with competitors. These same principles apply forcefully to military preparation. Success in war depends upon military preparedness, which, in turn, is based upon organized military resources. Loyal men, physically fit and trained, properly provided with war materials and sustained by the moral support of the nation, constitute the only guarantee of victory and an avoidance of national humiliation.

If we would avoid the waste inseparable from going to war without due preparation, we must be ready with a complete system for passing from a peace to a war establishment. Thus only may we avoid a repetition of the humiliation of having masses of patriotic young men in unsanitary camps, qualifying for the pension roll through lack of previous training in all that makes the soldier fit and worthy of the name. If Americans are ever called upon to fight for national existence against a combination of foreign foes, it is possible that volunteers would exceed the available guns, but there is nothing in our past history to justify the claim. The bounty and draft records sadly discount the orators on this subject. The right of a rich man to buy the services of a poor man as his substitute in war ought to be branded as one of the shameless practices of the Civil War to be forever banished by a Government which has as its cornerstone the political equality of men. The records show conclusively that the theory that every citizen of the Republic stands ready to march to its defense is wholly fallacious. Even if true, there would still remain the lamentable fact that mere readiness does not carry with it actual fitness.

It is unhappily true that in none of our wars has the Government been able to count upon the active political support, or even the good will, of all the nation. As to physical support, we have the deadly statistics of the Civil War, when the very life of the Union was at stake. Of the 2,778,304 men and boys who enlisted in the Union army, only 46,626 were over 24 years of age, and of the total enlisted, 2,159,798 were 21 years of age and under. There were five times as many boys of 16 years of age and under as there were men of 25 years of age and over. Similar conditions have existed in all our wars, and this explains why pensions continue through so many years after the close of every conflict. The evil will never be corrected until a system is adopted which will call upon well-developed men, as well as boys, for service in war.

There are many well-meaning people who contend that there should be no more wars and that military preparation begets a belligerent spirit. To formulate the incontrovertible but historical facts necessary to disprove the specious arguments of these advocates of peace at any price, would require an expenditure of time and mental effort which may be more profitably devoted to considering facts as we find them.

American pluck and luck have carried the nation through several conflicts and always with the same results, an immediate tightening of the purse-strings regarding all expenditures for military preparation. This unwise policy has met with approval in the past because there has never been serious public disapproval of it.

The formulation of policies to fit the problems resulting from the war with Spain was rendered extremely difficult because of the great diversity of opinion as to the wisdom of retaining colonial possessions, and both Congress and the executive departments have been compelled to adjust important affairs as dictated by the expediency of the moment. As other and equally grave problems have arisen, they have perforce received similar treatment and, in consequence, the army is now in a state of attenuation in relation to its widespread duties, indicating that the limit of elasticity has been reached.

It should not be assumed that the army has not been kept up to the highest possible state of discipline and efficiency consistent with its strength. Since the war with Spain nearly everything connected with arms and equipment has been changed in the effort to improve our army, whose morale, intelligence and battle training compare favorably with any troops. All these things are beyond question and are admitted by world critics.

Innumerable articles have been published from within and from without the army in the effort to secure the adoption of this or that measure of relief. Several years ago the proposition to create a Council of Defense was brought forward as a panacea for all our evils, inasmuch as one of the main functions of the council would be to formulate policies. The composition of the council included the President, several cabinet officers, chairmen of Senate and House Committees, military and naval officers. Nearly every one of these officials is burdened beyond his reasonable capacity with

work requiring study and executive action. The prospect of their attendance at meetings and their active personal consideration of important measures would be very remote.

The existing methods of providing for the organization and support of the numerous instrumentalities of government, including the army, have resulted from more than a century of legislative experience. The well-developed and understood method of accomplishing modifications of our military system, as an outcome of this long experience, contemplates that detailed bills embracing the necessary legislation shall be prepared at the War Department, and transmitted to Congress by the Secretary of War, with the approval of the President, for appropriate action. Comprehensive measures other than those recommended by the Secretary of War are seldom reported out of committee. Should a change of our military system be deemed necessary or a new military policy of any character be desired, there is no reason to suppose that a Council of Defense could obtain results superior to those worked out by the General Staff Corps and presented in the usual way direct to Congress. If Congress in its representation of the people deems action timely and wise, it will come; if they do not approve of immediate action, the recommendation of a Council of Defense would not alter matters.

While certain principles of the art of war remain unchanged from generation to generation, the material used by modern armies has become extremely complicated, so that we require many highly trained technical corps, in order that we may not lose any of the advantage which may be derived from the scientific application of modern inventions to the complex machinery of a great army. It is the special care of the regular army that the interests of the nation shall not suffer from any neglect to avail ourselves of every modern invention applicable to military purposes. This frequently involves sending to the scrap-heap implements and material only recently made the basis of self-congratulation because of their perfection as elements of defense.

It is not the character of our army or of the implements of war with which we are provided which have been giving us such grave concern, but the absence of a satisfactory system for maintaining in peace a trained force of citizens available in sufficient numbers to meet the emergencies of modern war.

It is a fact, too obvious to require argument, that nearly every proposition looking to the inauguration of a military peace establishment to meet the exigencies of war that has been submitted to Congress, has been based on what would probably obtain favorable action by that body rather than on conviction as to the needs of the case. A most glaring instance of this occurred subsequent to the war with Spain when the necessity for an increase of the regular army became urgent. The preparation of the measure for the reorganization of the army, which became a law February 2, 1901, was intrusted to the writer, who, a quarter of a century before, had had the privilege of serving under that rare student, General Emory Upton. When it was made known that the proposed bill contained provisions for the establishment of a General Staff Corps, instructions were received to leave out those provisions and every feature liable to cause argument and delay the passage of a measure having as its main feature a considerable increase of the army, urgently needed at the time to release volunteers whose terms of enlistment were about to expire.

A commission, comprised mainly of ex-officers of the Union and Confederate armies, which investigated conditions arising in the war with Spain, had found and reported upon certain specific defects of our military system, but it seemed nobody's business to initiate the necessary corrections.

In an article by the writer entitled "Will America Profit by Her Recent Military Lessons?" which appeared in May, 1902, in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, the most important paragraph indicated as follows the reform demanded in our military system:

The one crying need of the army during the first half century has been the want of a General Staff Corps, or body of officers whose business it is to do the preliminary planning for the army and to make of its various elements a more harmonious working machine. In this connection, a "Chief of Staff" must be substituted for the "Commanding General of the Army," or the General Staff will fall short of its full value. There is no place under our constitution for a "commander-in-chief" and a "commanding general"; and when this is recognized by appropriate legislation, the unbusiness-like methods and constant friction will disappear, to the great benefit of the country and army.

The war with Spain had placed the nation in a position



where it could no longer afford to neglect questions of such grave import to its future welfare, but an easy triumph and the sudden spreading of our wings as a "world-power" tended to a complacency fatal to the correction of many serious defects.

Our nation has no policy of territorial aggrandizement and does not cherish animosity towards any other nation. We have recently undertaken a solution of the question of national defense, but as yet the means provided do not assure a trained force sufficiently potential and immediately available for the exigencies of war as now comprehended in the operations of modern armies.

WILLIAM HARDING CARTER.